DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 072 PS 026 076

AUTHOR	Landsverk, Ruth Anne
TITLE	Families, Communities, Schools--Learning Together, Fall 1997. Bulletin 98122.
INSTITUTION	Wisconsin State Dept. of Public Instruction, Madison.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	38p.; The "Learning Together" packets are produced periodically, in the Fall and/or Spring of each year. For previous items in this series, see ED 392 524, ED 408 029, and ED 408 083.
AVAILABLE FROM	Families in Education Program, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 125 South Webster Street, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, WI 53707-7841; phone: 800-441-4563.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; Elementary Secondary Education; Family School Relationship; Homework; Learning Activities; Middle Schools; *Parent Participation; Parent Responsibility; Parent Role; *Parent School Relationship; *Parent Student Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Parenting Skills; Parents as Teachers; Partnerships in Education; School Attitudes; School Community Relationship; Student Attitudes; Television Viewing; World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS	American Education Week; Conversation; Goals 2000; Wisconsin

ABSTRACT

The Families in Education Program of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has existed since 1987 to increase awareness of the need for schools to involve parents as partners in the education of their children. This parents' and teachers' guide presents ways that the theme for American Education Week, "Teaching Children To Think and Dream!" can be implemented. Articles from this issue contain information on the following topics: (1) using activities from the American Education Week; (2) how principals can gain community support for schools; (3) how several school districts used Goals 2000 seed grants to promote family-community-school partnerships; (4) ways to strengthen family-teacher relationships; (5) students' attitudes toward and suggestions for schools; (6) family mealtime conversation starters; (7) family television viewing; (8) ways to positively influence children's development; (9) activities of the "Wisconsin Reads!" program; (10) redefining family involvement; and (11) ways to improve school-family-community partnerships in the middle grades. Also included are lists of things teachers wish parents would do and things parents wish teachers would do, family-fun web sites, guidelines for fair family discussions, guidelines for raising teenagers, and a checklist for helping children with homework. (KB)

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Families•Communities•Schools

Learning Together

Fall 1997

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Madison, Wisconsin

This publication is available from the

Families in Education Program
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
125 South Webster Street
P. O. Box 7841
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7841
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(800) 441-4563

Bulletin No. 98122

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Foreword

"Teaching Children to Think and Dream!" The theme for this year's American Education Week gives an appropriate message to parents and school staff alike. We need to make sure our children have skills but also that they have hope in the future.

In my annual message to school superintendents this fall, I pledged my commitment to an unceasing advocacy for:

- higher levels of academic achievement
- citizenship in our young people
- communities that are engaged in the business of educating our children

The American Education Week theme certainly fits well with those priorities. An engaged citizenry offers great hope for the future. The American Education Week theme has to be more than a one-week campaign to promote public schools. Ideally, it sets a tone for schools, families, and communities to work together for children.

Engaging parents and other community members in education means communicating with them. We need to listen to them. Over and over again, we hear citizens say they want and expect well-educated children; respectful, well-mannered young people; and to feel a part of their schools. Therefore, with our families and communities, we must

- establish higher, more meaningful levels of academic achievement for all children
- instill civic responsibility, basic human values, and an understanding of the importance of community service in all children
- create an atmosphere of inclusion, a sense that the broader community feels a part of the educational process, that its opinions are valued in the workings of the school, and that it sees and benefits from the strengths and contributions of its young people.

This *Learning Together* packet is one of the ways the Department of Public Instruction offers resources, rather than mandates, to help schools, families and communities come together to listen and learn from each other. We are excited about the many effective partnerships around the state which regard families and communities as rich resources for leadership and sharers of wisdom and knowledge rather than passive recipients of information. We hope the materials in this packet help you launch or improve your partnerships.

Please share with us your successes and challenges As a state agency, we can help facilitate sharing and networking. We invite you to log on to our DPI Web Page at *www.dpi.state.wi.us* or call us at (800)441-4563. Happy Partnering!

John T. Benson
State Superintendent

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Teaching Children to Think and Dream . . . Use American Education Week Ideas Year-Round

American Education Week will be celebrated November 16-22 this year, but the following ideas and activities can be used any time of the year to recognize individual contributions, welcome families and community members into schools, and invite everyone to have a voice in shaping the decisions made about children's learning.

The 1997 American Education Week (AEW) theme, "Teaching Children to Think and Dream," is a reminder that schools provide students with both skills and hope for the future, and that schools are places of learning, intelligence, and wonder. By working together, we can give students the tools they need to be whatever they want to be. Strengthen the bonds between your schools, families, and communities with these ideas:

- **Thanks.** Have students write a short thank-you note to someone—teacher, guidance counselor, support staff member, volunteer—anyone who works or has worked in a school and has helped them in the past.

- **Target Your Alumni.** Hold a reunion day, inviting alumni to return to school and talk with the students, visit with each other, and see what schools are like today. Use the occasion to launch an Alumni Hall of Fame, inviting nominations from the community, students, and parents, as well as alumni participants.

- **Spotlight District Initiatives.** More than 70 percent of communication is getting the attention of your audience. AEW helps you grab their attention, and it's a great time to demonstrate and "show off" some of your district or school goals for the year and how you are accomplishing them.

- **Celebrate Your History.** Launch a program to document your school history through interviews of alumni and senior citizens. Record these memories and moments with a video camera, and present those interviewed with copies of the finished product. Let everyone know what your school stands for.

- **Target the Media.** Invite members of the news media to talk with students about their work covering the issues of the day. Invite student editors to interview the media regarding freedom of the press and ethics in journalism. Hit the tough issues and use cable and/or TV programming where possible.

- **Celebrate Cultural Diversity.** Celebrate the cultural diversity in your community by bringing all groups together to share their rich heritage through music, food, and discussions. Build bridges of understanding with panels of various groups, sharing their concerns about racism.

- **Take a Survey.** Have a simple survey ready for visitors to fill out at American Education Week activities. Ask what information they are presently receiving about their schools. What could the schools do for them? What do they think the key problems are in education? What is right with education? How would they like to receive information? What programs would they like the school to offer? Remember to include a demographic question to identify those who respond, such as: Are you a parent of a student in our schools? Are you a parent of a student in a private or parochial school? Are you a senior citizen?, etc.

- **Hold an "Accountability Day."** Demonstrate that your students are learning the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic. Then show them how your students are also learning critical thinking, problem solving, and other critical skills needed for future success.

- **Hold a Series of Parenting Meetings.** Plan a series of meetings throughout the week to address concerns of parents: grading, drugs and violence, how to ensure your child is ready for kindergarten, living with your teenager and surviving, simple and fun ways for parents to teach science at home, preparing for a career and/or college, etc. Hold these meetings at times

and in places convenient for parents—local church, union meeting hall, community building—as well as in the schools.

- **Hold a Children's Summit.** Invite business and community leaders, parents and non-parents to address education reform, changes taking place in the schools, and steps needed to prepare students for the 21st century. Don't just talk, but seize the opportunity to "call for the sale." Invite participants to sign up to serve on special committees to implement suggestions made at the summit.

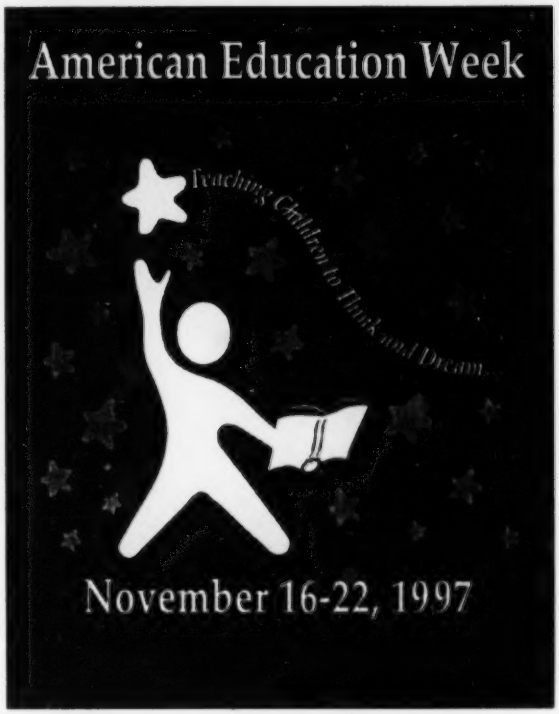
- **Hold a Parent Education Day.** Exhibit student art, offer booths for local service organizations to hand out information, and talk with parents about resources available to them. Have a "food fair" with samples of items prepared by the district food service department for their breakfast and lunch menus.

- **Take the School to the Community.** Hold demonstration classes in shopping malls or local office buildings. Don't limit your activities to art displays and musical programs. Consider showing classrooms in action, i.e., kindergarten students taking the first steps in reading readiness, primary students using computers, vocational students working on projects, and high school students debating national issues.

- **Teacher for a Day.** Invite your legislators and representatives, business leaders, and elected officials to sign up to teach for a day or a class period. Be sure you have a camera record these activities, and encourage media coverage. In fact, invite members of the media to also sign up to teach.

American Education Week Next Year: November 15-21, 1998

National School Public Relations Association, 15948 Derwood Road, Rockville, MD 20855, (301) 519-0496



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Reach Out for Community Support

Principals devote a great deal of effort—and justifiably so—to involving parents in the daily lives of their schools. That's because everybody realizes the importance of involving parents in their children's learning. But statistics will tell you that even if you brought every one of the parents into your school, you still would have only reached 25 percent of the adults in your community. That's a huge gap, and it dare not be ignored.

Surveys show that getting adults other than parents inside a school building markedly increases support for education in budgets, bond issues, and other public forums. These adults can also contribute mightily to school activities and the instructional program.

The question, however, has always been how to get the growing numbers of non-parents into the schools. Writing in the October 1996 issue of *Thrust for Educational Leadership*, published by the Association of California School Administrators, Michael Simkins offers 10 "easy ways" to involve the entire community in the life of your school. Simkins, a former elementary school principal, is now project manager for the 21st Century Education Initiative-Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network in San Jose.

Here is a summary of his tips:

Start a "key communicators" network. Start with about 25 people to help with rumor control. Target people who are not parents of current students and have a good reputation in the community and interact with many people each day. Then keep them regularly informed with newsletters, notes, etc. Give them the principal's direct phone line to call any time for information about something they've heard.

Use annual events to create ongoing involvement of clubs and groups. Inviting such groups as service clubs, scouts, little league, or the chamber of commerce to play a role in an annual school-wide event can ensure their long-term involvement with the school.

Ask community members to help assess student work. Include members of the community on the judges panel for the science fair, T-shirt design contest, or debate tournament. Also ask members of the community to help with the school's self-assessment activities.

Establish award programs sponsored by local groups. National organizations, like Kiwanis and the Daughters of the American Revolution, have excellent programs you can bring into your school. Or develop your own program and ask a local group to sponsor it.

Involve community members in school governance. Whether your school employs advisory committees or school site councils, don't limit membership to parents only. The perspective of a grandparent, business person, or young adult can add valuable insight.

Look for special projects that offer partnership opportunities. For example, ask the local historical society to help students research and write a school history. Perhaps the area's literacy council would help start a tutoring—or tutor training—program. Painting a mural or planting a courtyard? Ask neighbors to help plan it.

Organize a "campus watch" program. Keeping a school safe is not an easy task, so recruit the neighbors to keep an eye on the building. Give them a list of phone numbers to call if they see vandalism, broken sprinklers, etc. Also give them the number of someone to call if they have a problem themselves. Looking out for each other is a two-way street.

Speak out and speak in! Routinely invite people from the community to come to the school and address the students. Depending on their expertise or experience, they can make formal presentations to large assemblies or meet informally with individual students or small groups. On the other hand, the principal ought to get out and speak to local service clubs and chambers of commerce. Or the principal could take over a teacher's class while the teacher

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talks to a local group about an important aspect of the school program.

Eat together! Simkins suggests, "The community that eats together grows together." A simple way to build community involvement is to create opportunities to share food. Invite local business people to lunch, assigning each guest to a table where children have been prepared with things to talk about. The same format can work with retirees or local college students. Invite local residents for coffee and doughnuts.

Call in the news media. Don't wait for a crisis to get to know the local media. Talk to them, offer columns and stories, and be available for their needs. You won't reach every community member directly, so the media can help bridge that gap.

Principals' Proven Tips for Positive Relationships

Recognize support staff publicly for their accomplishments at a PTA or staff meeting. Report their successes in the school newsletter and staff bulletin.

Include a coupon in your school newsletter for free admission to a school athletic event. It's a great way to get people "into your newsletter" and encourage them to read it.

Establish service projects for students to conduct at senior centers (for instance, delivering Easter baskets, decorating during holidays, visiting seniors on Grandparents Day).

Host community leaders for a breakfast or lunch at your school with food prepared by your food service class. Have your students meet the guests and take them on a tour of the school after the event so the leaders can see what students learn in school today.

Work with local businesses to establish summer internships for interested teachers. This can provide additional revenue for teachers and also help them remain current in their field.

Establish an open-door policy or some other way for parents to obtain accurate answers to their questions about school. It's a wise use of time to clear up any misunderstanding before rumors start spreading throughout the community.

*Adapted from the National School Public Relations Association, **It Starts on the Frontline**/February 1997, 1501 Lee Highway, Suite 201, Arlington, Virginia 22209. (703)528-5840.*

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Partnership Potluck: Ideas from Around Wisconsin

In 1996-97, nearly 60 teams of families, teachers, community members, and school administrators from across Wisconsin used Goals 2000 monies to create and improve partnerships. Each team decided together how to use the $300 seed money grant they received after attending a two-day statewide workshop in July, featuring Joyce Epstein, director of the Center for Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning.

Following, are some examples of how teams used their Goals 2000 seed grants to promote family-community-school partnerships:

Baraboo Junior High started a Positive Student Incentive Program which includes sending "rainbow cards" to the families of students who have done something good at school academically, as citizens, or otherwise. Students recognized in the program are also invited with their parents to the Breakfast Club, a meal prepared by teachers before school.

Jefferson Elementary, Green Bay, built "communities of families" for three evenings last fall. Principal Mary Ann Anderson said families shared in informal, grade-level dinnertime conversations at a meal prepared by staff and PTA members, and were invited into their children's classrooms to learn about expectations for learning, support information, and opportunities to become involved in the school. Drawings for a turkey on each night and various other incentives were offered to encourage attendance.

The **East Troy School District** addressed parents' concerns about the childcare-to-kindergarten transition. Parents of preschoolers were surveyed about their use of child care, and childcare providers were invited to attend a meeting describing the Framework for Participation, the district's kindergarten curriculum, and expectations for learning. A second workshop for childcare providers and teachers also gave parents the chance to describe their concerns and frustrations about the transitions their young children had to make.

The **Kickapoo Junior/Senior High School** parent-teacher group, Partners in Education, sponsored "Bring Your Parents to School Days," in which a few parents each week spent the school day with their child. The P.I.E. group sponsored four Parent Informational meetings and started a family resource shelf in the school library, according to Principal Keith Rocklewitz.

The **Kohler School District** initiated plans to start a family center in the building. The partnership team is presently considering where to locate the center, how to best publicize it, and what sources of information are available from the community for families using the center.

The team from **Victory School, Milwaukee**, created "all-school clubs." The clubs, involving students, staff, parents, and community members, met every other Friday afternoon beginning in November and provided students and their families with opportunities to explore activities such as cooking, camping, photography, drama, and weaving. The clubs offered students a chance to re-capture with their families the excitement and success of early learning experiences while fostering effective skills for the future.

Muskego Elementary School started a Parent-to-Parent Classroom Mentoring Program. Parents from each homeroom volunteered to ease new parents' transition to the school by helping them participate in school events, sharing information about their child's classroom and school, and extending a hand of friendship.

The Drummond School District team established a Parent Advisory Committee to reach out to parents of children birth through five. Many parents and children meet for the first time when their children attend kindergarten in this 740-square-mile, heavily-forested district, and the school is anxious to help parents prepare their children for school as well as network amongst themselves. The committee hosted a very successful brunch for parents of incoming

kindergartners, held during their children's kindergarten visitation.

The Mound View Elementary Partnership Team, Elk Mound School District, aimed at making senior citizens important players in the education community. The school decided to pilot a project in which senior citizens read to and with elementary students. They hired a senior citizen to organize the project and recruit senior volunteers. Some seed monies were used to pay recruiters' mileage. In May, during Grandparents and Senior Citizens Day festivities, the school also opened its "Village Room," a place in the school building where senior citizens could gather, share a cup of coffee and conversation, and participate in school and community activities. Elk Mound's only cafe closed three years ago, leaving no place for seniors to socialize. The room will be staffed by the recruiter and high school student assistants and features comfortable furniture, a kitchen area, an information center for school and community activities, and computers, VCRs, and camcorders for public use. Small group workshops teaching seniors to use computers will be held, and visitors who volunteer at least an hour a day will be served a free school hot lunch.

The Potosi School District capped its yearlong "Community Unity" theme by unveiling a community quilt at a spring Family Wellness Day resource fair. The quilt featured 70 blocks designed by community and school organizations and assembled by community members. School staff, parents, senior citizens, and students helped plan the Wellness Day and present mini-workshops for all ages. Some seed grant monies were also used to make student-designed, "good news" placemats for local restaurants. The placemats were designed to increase communication with families and highlight school activities.

Jerstad-Agerholm Middle School, Racine, held Saturday morning learning sessions for families in a neighborhood church and community center. Families participated in parenting presentations while students learned about homework skills and self-esteem. The programs are run by school staff and volunteers and complement efforts by the school to increase learning-at-home and two-way communications with families.

The Altoona School District's Family-Community-School Action Team, working with the Altoona Children's Council, used its seed grant to sponsor "A Taste of the Arts," an evening of entertainment for senior citizens featuring the K-12 children of Altoona. The mid-February event welcomed senior citizens into the schools and introduced them to the many different musical groups that are part of the school's curricula. Invitations were hand-delivered by children. Senior citizens were escorted in by middle school students, seated at tables decorated with student artwork, and served dessert by middle school students. The team and council hope to improve communication and collaboration among students and senior citizens.

The McFarland School District team worked with its K-4 Parent-Teacher Organization to develop and conduct a parent survey. The survey indicated K-4 parents wanted to know more about parenting-family skills and learning at home to help their children succeed in 1996-97. They decided to hold three parent training sessions: How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, Self-Esteem, and How Your Child Learns. Each session, attended by about 50 people, was held on a weekday evening and the following Saturday morning. PTO provided childcare for all sessions and attendees were asked to complete a short evaluation of their session. Next year, the school will focus partnership efforts on improving decisionmaking among families and community.

The Menomonie School District/North and Cedar Falls Elementary Team decided to improve learning at home opportunities by creating activity bags that children in each grade could check out at the school library and bring home. The activity bags contained at-home learning ideas and opportunities in reading for the primary grades and in math for the intermediate grades. The school is involving the PTO in expanding and coordinating the use of the activity bags for next year. Future plans also include establishing an intergenerational mentoring program in cooperation with individuals and groups from the community.

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Ten Things Teachers Wish Parents Would Do

1. Be involved. Parent involvement helps students learn, improves schools, and helps teachers work with you to help your child succeed.
2. Provide resources at home for learning. Utilize your local library, and have books and magazines available in your home. Read with your children each day.
3. Set a good example. Show your children by your own actions that you believe reading is both enjoyable and useful. Monitor television viewing and the use of videos and game systems.
4. Encourage students to do their best in school. Show students you believe education is important and that you want your children to do their best.
5. Value education and seek a balance between school-work and outside activities. Emphasize your children's progress in developing the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in school and in life.
6. Recognize factors that take a toll on students' classroom performance:
   a. Consider the possible negative effects of long hours at after-school jobs or in extracurricular activities. Work to maintain a balance between school responsibilities and outside commitments.
   b. View drinking and excessive partying as serious matters. While most parents are concerned about drug abuse, many fail to recognize that alcohol, over-the-counter drugs, and common substances used as inhalants are the most frequently abused.
7. Support school rules and goals. Take care not to undermine school rules, discipline, or goals.
8. Use pressure positively. Encourage children to do their best but don't pressure them by setting goals too high or by scheduling too many activities.
9. Call teachers early if there is a problem so that there is still time to solve it. Don't wait for teachers to call you.
10. Accept your responsibility as parents. Don't expect the school and teachers to take over your obligations as parents. Teach children self-discipline and respect for others at home—don't rely on teachers and schools to teach these basic behaviors and attitudes.

Ten Things Parents Wish Teachers Would Do

1. Build students' self-esteem by using praise generously when appropriate while avoiding ridicule and negative public criticism.
2. Get to know as much as you can about each child's needs, interests, and special talents as well as the way each child learns best.
3. Communicate often and openly with parents. Contact them early about academic or behavior problems and be candid rather than defensive when discussing school problems.
4. Assign meaningful homework on a regular basis that helps children learn. Provide parents with direction on how they can work with their children to make the most out of homework activities.
5. Set high academic standards for all students. Expect all of them to learn, and help them to do so.
6. Vary your teaching methods—make learning challenging and relevant to children and their world.
7. Care about children, since children learn best when taught by warm, friendly, caring, and enthusiastic teachers.
8. Treat all children fairly, and don't play favorites.
9. Enforce a positive discipline code based on clear and fair rules that are established at the beginning of each school year. Remember to reinforce positive classroom behavior rather than just punish negative actions.
10. Encourage parent and family involvement by reaching out to involve parents in their children's education. Show they how they can help their children at home. Remember that parents want to work with teachers to help their children do their best.

Adapted from *The National PTA Talks to Parents: How to Get the Best Education for Your Child* by M.J. Cutright, Ph.D., 1989 by the National PTA.

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Family-Teacher Relations Strengthened by Both Views

By Maureen D. Mack, Ph.D., and Sherry Macaul, Ph.D., UW-Eau Claire, School of Education

Ask any teacher who the most important people are in the success of a child's education and she will respond, "the child's family." Similarly, ask parents who the most important players are in the success and well-being of their child at school and you are likely to hear, "my child's teacher." Beyond such obvious mutual acknowledgment of each other's importance, parents and teachers have very different perspectives about what each of them needs from the other to help the child learn. The challenge for schools today is how to get parents, families, and teachers together so they can talk, share, plan and celebrate the activities and accomplishments of the children and youth they both care about so deeply.

As parents, former classroom teachers, and now university education professors, we propose that we must see the task of educating our children from both the parents'-family's view and the teacher's view. What do parents and families want? What do teachers need? In our collective experiences as parents, family members, and educators, the following comments are what we hear over and over again from families and teachers:

Parent and Family View

Families are encouraged when teachers view them as equal partners in the education of their children. Parents and families of school-aged children appreciate two-way communication. Parents and families really value the opportunity to meet teachers early in the school year. Attending an open class meeting where parents can meet other parents, speak informally with the classroom teacher, and join in a number of welcoming activities are important communication builders for families and teachers. Work and home telephone numbers can be exchanged, in-school and out-of-school helpers can be signed up, and a common set of ground rules and goals can be created together during these meetings.

Parents and family members of schoolchildren love communication tools such as Friday folders, classroom newsletters, and informal telephone circles. Parents welcome the use of communication techniques which speak directly to parents and family members regarding important dates, topics of future curriculum units, and fun in-home assignments. However, the most important information parents and family members want is accurate and early indicators of their children's classroom performance.

Parents and family members desire to be respected and valued as important players in their children's total educational experience. They are honored when teachers ask them to be involved in classroom activities. They feel valued when teachers ask parents and families for their opinions or suggestions on how they can participate, both during in-school and out-of-school activities. Perhaps most important, parents and families want to be consulted on how to best plan for the development of their children's interests, talents, community involvement projects, and future educational goals.

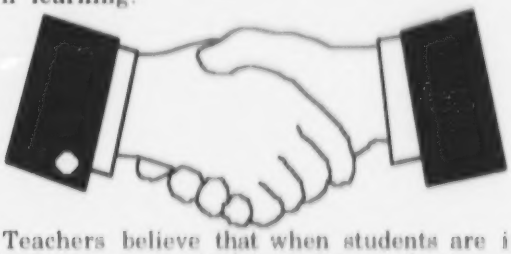
Families are encouraged when:

- teachers involve them as important partners in their child's learning
- teachers ask parents and families what expectations they have of their children's teachers
- teachers offer opportunities for parents to sign contracts to support in-school and in-home learning activities
- teachers offer opportunities for after-school programs that include technology, arts, music, and cultural programs which are creative in nature
- schools offer recreational opportunities in addition to competitive athletic sports
- teachers offer middle school children supervised opportunities to engage in community service and volunteer experiences

Teacher View

Teachers are encouraged when families demonstrate an active interest in the academic and social progress of their children. Teachers who create relevant opportunities for parental involvement in both academic and social activities find that such opportunities foster trust, cooperation, respect, and quality communication. Teachers find that when students and families work together, students are more confident. Stu-

dents assume greater responsibility for their own learning.



Teachers believe that when students are involved in extracurricular projects, volunteer activities at school or in the community, students and families benefit directly. Regular involvement with carefully selected and screened community adults provides opportunities for networking, mentoring, and role modeling.

Teachers are encouraged when families show interest in learning specific ways to assist their children with their school work. Parents and family members can learn ways to support and assist their children by attending and participating in after-school events, such as math labs, science fairs, and social studies explorations.

Teachers strongly believe that the first and most important teachers in the lives of children are their parents and families. Children look to their parents and families to provide activities and experiences that make their school lessons a part of their lives. Parent direction and participation in activities, such as supervising television programs, encouraging children to find nutritious foods at the grocery, and writing editorials to the local newspaper, are just a few ways that parents and families can link children's school day to their lives.

Families and teacher both share a strong interest in helping students realize their potential. The key to transforming such visions into reality is establishing and maintaining positive and productive family and teacher relations. Families and teachers are encouraged when strong home and school relations lead to student success.

Teachers are encouraged when:

- families offer to share their time and talents with the school
- families show an active interest in the academic and social progress of their children
- families assist their children in goal setting and becoming responsible for their own learning
- family members participate and share ideas for the planning of after-school events
- families work with teachers to select and screen community adults who are interested in working with children and youth in after-school activities
- families of middle level learners continue to express with the same level of intensity their interest in and involvement with their child's learning as at the elementary level

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What Do Students Want (And Not Want) From Schools?

by Erin Euler, DPI Summer Intern

Twenty students, ages 9 to 18, participated in a one-hour facilitated conversation with Tony Wagner, president of the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, and guest presenter at the DPI Family-Schools-Community Workshop, July 23-24, 1997, Eau Claire. During the conversation, Wagner asked students to talk about one or two things that they like and one or two things they would like to change in their schools. He directed students to make their remarks issue-oriented. No names were to be used. Following is a summary of students' comments reflecting their feelings about their schools.

We like

Openness and trust among the teachers

Meetings and other opportunities that allow students a voice on issues affecting their education, such as school improvement, diversity, and communicating with teachers

Challenging courses and interesting clubs

Teachers who are willing to stay after school to help students

A close-knit school community

Teachers who give us "a second chance"

Teachers who try to solve problems

We don't like

Teachers who just don't seem to care

School administrators who scoot around problems instead of making decisions and enforcing actions

Teachers who act authoritarian

Lack of communication between teachers and students

Student cliques

Lack of respect and manners among students/teachers and students/students

Lack of respect for substitute and student teachers

Classes in which students participate passively instead of actively (i.e., lecturing and note-taking vs. hands-on activities)

Teachers who offer the same curriculum year after year

Teachers who mark students tardy for being one minute late

Too little time between classes, especially when you have to run to the other end of the school

The lack of communication between students or possible misinterpretations

Lack of mutual respect

Teachers who have favorite students

Restrictive use of the computers

Too many worksheets (repetition)

We'd like more

Assertive leadership and effective decision making among school administrators

Teachers who give more choices in their classes

Shorter days and classes

Time between classes

Students who respect teachers and each other

Student involvement within the classroom instead of teacher-only all of the time

Open campus and freedom

Teacher evaluations each quarter or at least each semester

Changes in teachers' attitudes towards students – more professional yet friendly

We'd like fewer (or less)

Required classes so that we can take more electives

Student intolerance

Punishment of the whole class when one student is at fault

Erin, a Madison native, is majoring in teacher education at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

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Family-Fun Web Sites for Learning Together

by Berta Barillas, DPI Summer Intern

Spending time with children is an important way for families to help them learn. Traditional family learning activities have included reading together, taking trips, storytelling, and working on crafts and projects. New technology and computers offer families yet another option for learning and having fun together: surfing the Internet.

Many kid-safe family websites have emerged that allow the caregiver and child to delve into activities both educational and entertaining. Charged with perusing the Web, I found the following sites to be among the most interesting for families:

PBS (http://www.pbs.org/): This site offers a way for parents and children to preview new shows and programs to be aired in the coming months. The site also has a newsletter featuring PBS-related events and articles. Because it contains a lot of fairly detailed information, older kids and their parents may find it more interesting.

Discovery Channel (http://school.discovery.com/): This site focuses on people who are "deeply committed to teaching today's children." The section, *School Stories*, offers a unique look at U.S. education, focusing on different schools nationwide. *School Stories* is also aired in 30-minute segments on The Learning Channel. This site, especially informative for older children, teens, and adults, also has a Program Calendar, a guide to TV Programs, and a Shopping Catalog.

Parent Soup (http://www.parentsoup.com): This site, in my opinion, is the very best because it offers a ton of themes, each divided into a wide variety of topics. Have a question about a child or parent issue? They'll have an answer to it! Categories include Activities, Health, Safety & Babies; Toddlers, Money, Pregnancy & Birth, Relationships, Education, Sports/Outdoor Activities, Entertainment/Leisure, Teens, Travel, and, of course, Family. Because it appeals to a variety of ages and stages, this is a great site for the whole family.

U.S. Family (http://www.contact.org/usfamily.htm): All kinds of caregivers—single mothers and fathers, adoptive parents, grandparents, new parents—will find this site worth watching. It deals with issues that other sites pass by: Gay Kids, Violence Prevention, Sibling Support, Stepfamilies, Children's Rights, Separation & Divorce, and Teens. Its focus on such issues makes it a good site for adults and young adults.

Maddy Mayhem's Kidstuff (http://wchat.on.ca/merlene/kid.htm): This is a really neat site for elementary kids, and a good site for parent and child to browse together. The host of the page is a young girl, Madelin, helped out by her mom, of course. Young children, who will easily relate to Madelin, will find the language non-technical and understandable. The site is very colorful, a plus for those who learn visually.

Disney's Family (http://www.family.com/): This site is also very visual with lots of great graphics. It's loaded with activities for parent and child. Options to investigate include: Parenting, Family, Activities, Recipes, Travel, and Education. Younger children and middle school-aged children will be attracted to this site.

Parents and Children Together Online (http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/fl/ras.html): This link-magazine's goal is family literacy and provides an excellent way for families to read together. It features stories for kids, arranged by their ages, with lots of articles and book reviews for parents to link into. If your child is a reluctant reader, this site may help.

Donna's Day (http://www.ktca.org/donnasday/index.html): This site is based on a new PBS television series. Donna, the host, is a "nationally-acclaimed, creative parent expert and mother." She includes Ideas, Projects (which are great because she uses inexpensive, everyday, household

items), Recipes that are presented on the TV show, Upcoming Programs, and Information on ordering books and tapes. This is another good site for parents to browse with younger or elementary-aged children.

Positive Parenting (http://positiveparenting.com/): The folks at Positive Parenting are "dedicated to providing resources and information to make parenting rewarding, effective, and fun." Features include: their Newsletter, Articles, Organizations, a Shopping Catalog, and Classes & Training. A special feature at this site is its Spanish version, which I thought was really cool for its attempt to hurdle the language barrier for Spanish-speaking parents. This very informative site requires considerable reading, perhaps making it more attractive to adult caregivers. A good site to log onto when you're relaxed and have some time.

The Family Internet Directory Online (http://www.clark.net/pub/soh/fido.htm): This site gives you the opportunity to link into 500 other sites in case my recommendations here aren't sufficient. Click on this one, and you'll be on your way to Surfland! Some of the options in this site are: Museums, the White House, Sports, and Fun Games (like Waldo in Cyberspace). A good page for the entire family, with chances to win lots of awards.

Berta is majoring in teacher education at University of Wisconsin-Whitewater and hopes to teach high school history in her hometown of Milwaukee

Editor's Note: Some more good picks are:

Family Education Network (http://familyeducation.com), with myriad opportunities for learning about child discipline and learning, best practices, and links to local, state, and national resources that actually let you access your community calendar or find out when the next PTA meeting is (if your school is online).

U.S. Dept. of Education

(http://www.ed.gov/) offering a multitude of publications and resources to help families become engaged in their child's learning. Everything from helping your child with homework to mobilizing community resources for children is online here.

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Family Guidelines for a Fair Discussion

These *Rules for Fair Family Discussion* were developed by the Schools, Children & Youth Committee of the Waukesha County Family Peace Initiative. This committee was developed as part of the Initiative to:

- help create a community atmosphere where children and youth are valued and respected and where families are not isolated;
- work with Waukesha County schools and community organizations which focus on young people and their families; and
- establish a community standard for conflict resolution and family rules.

These rules are intended to help establish that community standard. The rules are based on adaptations from other communities and therapeutic environments. They have been used in schools, counseling offices, and have been posted on refrigerators in home. Please feel free to use these rules and the discussion guide in any way you wish. For more information, call The Mental Health Association in Waukesha County, Nancy Cummens, Prevention Education Coordinator, (414) 547-0769.

Family Guidelines for Fair Discussion

1. No name calling.
2. Stay out of each other's "face," no physical touching (hitting, pushing, poking, etc.).
3. Only talk about the here and now. Use the past for historical reference only—not to change things that cannot be changed.
4. Stay and finish the discussion, unless one party asks for a time-out and both parties agree upon a time to finish the discussion.
5. Leave the discussion open to any subject of concern.
6. Don't tell the other person what they are thinking or feeling (mind reading).
7. Use "I" statements only, not "you" statements. Formula for using "I" statements: I feel (**state a feeling: glad /mad /sad /scared**). When you (**describe the exact behavior that you would like to see happen**).
8. Let the other person know what you are feeling and let the other person have their own feelings.
9. Do not intentionally hurt the other person's feelings or use put down statements. Also avoid being sarcastic or mimicking the other person.
10. Refrain from screaming or yelling.
11. No lecturing; let the other person have a chance to speak.
12. Focus the discussion on the people who are present.
13. Listen to the other person and be aware of each other's body language.
14. Make an alternate suggestion of what you are **for**, do not just be **against**.
15. Do not argue when anyone is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
16. Schedule regular family meeting times, strictly for communication.
17. Summarize any agreements made as a result of the conflict.

Adapted by the Schools, Children, and Youth Committee of the Waukesha County Family Peace Initiative.

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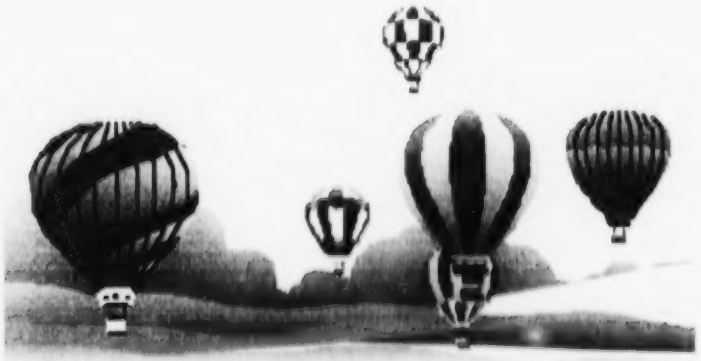
Your Mealtime Conversation Starters

Even when we don't have to, mealtimes can often be plagued by the "eat-and-run" habit. How can families take advantage of mealtimes as occasions to listen, laugh, and learn new things about each other? Getting the conversation rolling is a good way to hook family members into staying at the table before the outside world intervenes, as it so often does.

While the old ideal of eating together every day is getting harder and harder to fulfill, a good conversation helps families create strong bonds and strong memories between times. Here are some conversation starters, but make your own!

- What do you like most about yourself?
- What makes you proud of your family?
- What's your favorite kind of food? Why?
- What would a perfect day be like for you?
- What are the five best things you like about fall?
- What sport or hobby have you always wanted to try?
- What do you remember about being little?
- How would you describe yourself to someone who has never met you?
- Describe three good things about your (sister, father, grandmother, etc.)
- At what time in your life have you been the happiest?
- What's your favorite book? Why?
- What's the best Christmas/birthday present you ever received? Why?
- What's your favorite movie and why?
- If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?
- What type of music do you like? Who is your favorite group?
- If you won the lottery, what would you do with that money?
- Who is your hero or role model?
- What is the funniest thing that happened to you today?
- What kind of homework do you have?



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For Parents: Laws for Raising Teens

By Jeff Herring, Marriage and Family Therapist

A couple asks: "We have two children who are about to enter the teenage years. They're ages ten and twelve. We have had relatively little trouble so far and would like to keep it that way. Are there any general guidelines for parents of teenagers?" These parents are asking for assistance before any problems arise, and thus are thinking preventatively. That's wise.

"Raise up children in the way they should go," according to a proverb," and when they are old they will not depart from it." Not only can I offer them guidelines, I'll go so far as to offer them universal laws on the raising of teenagers.

A universal law in the physical sciences is, for example, the law of gravity. It doesn't matter if you ignore it, don't believe in it or don't think it applies to you. If you violate it by jumping off a tall building, you will go splat. Along the same lines, if you violate a universal law on raising teens once too often, you might go splat as a family.

Here's a sampling of some of these universal laws:

Law of Belonging. The greatest need of teenagers (after music and the phone) is a strong sense of belonging. They need to feel they are a part of something bigger than themselves. If they don't get it in a healthy place—with family, worthwhile friends, clubs, sports, youth groups, etc.—they will get it in an unhealthy place—with inappropriate friends, drugs, gangs, or cults. The parents' job is to make sure they get it in a healthy place, even if they don't like it all the time.

Law of Hope. Recent statistics show that the only age group in which the suicide rate is rising is adolescents. This is the direct result of a lack of hope—hope for the future, hope that things will get better.

Law of Power. Once you enter into a power struggle with a teen, you have already lost it. Remember the closing line of the movie, War Games: "Interesting game... the only winning move is not to play."

Law of Control. Trying to control a teen is like trying to put pants on a gorilla. It's just going to frustrate you and really irritate the gorilla.

Law of Management. A management approach to raising teens puts parents clearly in charge. The goal is to manage them eventually out of your lives and into their own. The goal of the parenting job is to eliminate the job.

Law of Voice. In a well-functioning family, teens almost always get a voice. They just don't always get to vote. Consistently violate either side of this equation and you've got trouble.

Law of Modeling. If you don't want your teen doing something, make sure you are not doing it yourself. Teens have very strong and sensitive "hypocrisy meters" and are eager to use them.

Law of Punishment. Punishment often springs from anger. Punishment breeds resentment and a desire for revenge. Teens have many creative ways to retaliate.

Law of Consequences. Consequences teach teens about the real world. In general, consequences need to be reasonable, respectful, swift, and strong enough to get the teens' attention.

Law of Structure, Part I. Parents need to set boundaries and structure from Day One. If you don't do this while they are young, what makes you think they will obey a curfew once they have a car?

Law of Structure, Part II. Child Therapist Art Cleveland says, "We tend to overstructure the time of children and understructure the time of teenagers." Teens need boundaries and structure just as much as children do, if not more.

Law of Twenty Feet. This law states that at a certain age, you must walk at least twenty feet away from your teen if you are in a public place. Thirty feet if you're in the mall.

Law of W's. When teens are away from home, **parents** need to know who they are with, where they are, what they are doing, and what time they will be back.

I hope these laws will get you started on managing the teen years.

Herring originally wrote this for the Tallahassee Democrat, P. O. Box 990, Tallahassee, FL 32302. Reprinted with permission.

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A Checklist for Helping Your Child With Homework

Make Sure Your Child Has

- ✓ A quiet place to work with good light.
- ✓ Time each day for doing homework.
- ✓ Basic supplies, such as paper, pencils, pens, markers, and ruler.

Questions to Ask Your Child

- ✓ What's your homework today?
- ✓ Is the homework clear? (If not, suggest calling the school's homework hotline or a classmate.)
- ✓ When is it due?
- ✓ Do you need special resources (e.g., a trip to the library or access to a computer)?
- ✓ Do you need special supplies (e.g., graph paper or posterboard)?
- ✓ Have you started today's homework? Finished it?
- ✓ Is it a long-term assignment (e.g., a term paper or science project)?
- ✓ For a major project, would it help to write out the steps or make a schedule?
- ✓ Would a practice test be useful?

Other Ways To Help

- ✓ Look over your child's homework, but don't do the work!
- ✓ Meet the teachers early in the year and find out about homework policy.
- ✓ Review teacher comments on homework that has been returned and discuss with your child.
- ✓ Observe your child's style of learning and try to understand how he works best (e.g., by using visual aids or by reading some material aloud).
- ✓ Contact the teacher if there's a homework problem you can't resolve.
- ✓ Congratulate your child on a job well done.

Resources: This information was taken from *Helping Your Child With Homework*, one of a number of publications for parents published by the U.S. Department of Education. To find out what's available, call 1-800-USA-LEARN.

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Take Charge of Your Family TV Viewing

Television has a tremendous influence on the lives of American children, offering them a look at many things they will never have the chance to see for themselves. But TV viewing, especially by children, needs to be controlled. Above all else, TV teaches, and that's why it is so important to be concerned about what children learn when they watch television.

How much TV to view is a personal choice for every family, but experts tell us the key is to change the way we view television. Following are some tips for families to use as they take charge of their TV's and make television viewing a conscious choice, not just a habit

Make TV watching a conscious, planned-for activity. Children should ask your permission to watch TV and not be allowed to just casually "channel surf" to see if anything sparks their interest. The simple act of asking gives you the opportunity to respond with a very important one-word question of your own: Why? Each time you do it you'll be reinforcing the principle that "We watch a specific show, not just whatever is on."

Establish family guidelines for selecting programs. Children should know what you value and the reasons for your choices.

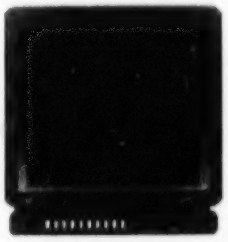
Set limits on how much TV your family watches. For example, some experts suggest that preschoolers only view an hour or so a day, and that older children be limited to a maximum of two hours a day. Once you determine the right limits for you and your family, stick to them!

Set an example for your children. Make your own TV watching a conscious, planned-for activity.

Choose programs together. Take time one day each week to review TV program guides for the week ahead. Check channel listings for programs with themes and subjects matching your family guidelines. Decide together how your children will "spend" their number of TV viewing hours.

Look for programs that offer other perspectives, principles or images your children do not usually see on TV. For example, shows where non-violence wins out over violence, or where individuals aren't always after money, sex or power. Different viewpoints are helpful to your child's education.

And remember, when a selected program is over, turn the TV off!



Make TV watching an interactive family event. Television doesn't have to end family discussion and interaction. Watch it together and use every opportunity to talk about what you are seeing and hearing. Television can stimulate conversation about topics that can be difficult for some families to discuss, such as feelings about divorce or appropriate sexual behavior.

And it's OK to talk back to your TV. Letting your children hear your values—in a non-threatening way—is useful. Make a particular point of responding to sexism, racism, and unnecessary violence but remember to point out positive portrayals on television as well.

Plan special viewing times to watch with your child and let TV expand and enlarge your world. Look ahead for programs which will stimulate your child's imagination and watch them together. Then, find related books and magazines at your public library to help continue the learning process.

Use TV as a springboard for other learning experiences. Watching a program on TV can be a useful bridge to reading and other real world activities. TV can create interest in a new topic or idea, thus providing opportunities to learn more about them in other ways. Here are some examples:

When a topic on TV sparks your child's interest, get to the library or museum and explore the subject further. During program breaks, ask children what they think might happen next. This helps develop verbal skills and creative thinking.

Use TV shows to inspire creative expression through drawing or writing. Don't let TV be an excuse for not participating in other activities.

The schedule of TV shows can be a good way for children to learn how to tell time. Ask them where the hands of the clock will be when it's time for their favorite TV shows.

Having your child tell you about a program you missed will help develop valuable communication skills.

Building a Home Video Library. Make it a regular point to tape your child's favorite shows for future viewing, especially those that combine

entertainment and learning. Taping shows to watch later helps children recognize that they can choose outside play, homework, chores, or other activities instead of being tied to the afternoon cartoons and reruns. Children will gladly watch repeated showings of a good video as much as they like hearing a favorite bedtime story again and again.

Based on a handout from *Parenting in a TV Age, A Media Literacy Workshop Kit*,™, ©1991, Center for Media Literacy, Los Angeles, CA.

Five Things to Teach Your Children About Commercials

Watching TV isn't as easy as it looks. The following list of advertising techniques can help your children become aware of the subtle difference between hip and hype!

Incredible, indestructible toys

Many toy commercials show their toys in lifelike fashion, doing incredible things—airplanes do loop-the-loops, dolls cry, and drawing sets produce beautiful results. This would be fine if the toys really did these things.

Playing with our emotions

Commercials often create an emotional feeling that draws you into the advertisement and makes you feel good. The fast-food commercials, featuring father and daughter eating out together, or the long-distance phone companies reaching out to someone, are good examples. We are more attracted by products that make us feel good.

Pictures of ideal children

The children in commercials are often a little older and a little more perfect than the target audiences of the ad. A commercial targeting eight-year-olds will show 11 or 12-year-old models playing with an eight-year-old's toy.

Products in the very best light

Selective editing is used in all commercials, but especially in commercials for athletic toys, like footballs. Commercials show only brilliant catches and perfect throws. Unfortunately, that's not the way most children experience these toys.

Big names, big bucks

Sports heroes, movie stars and teenage heartthrobs tell our children what to eat and what to wear. Children listen, not realizing that the star is paid handsomely for the endorsement. See for yourself!

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Everybody Can Make a Difference

by Marian Wright Edelman

We adults look at the daunting challenge of ensuring that all children are raised to be kind, healthy, intelligent, and moral in an increasingly hostile society and wonder whether we have enough money, education, or time to really make a positive difference in their lives.

From now on, whenever you start doubting whether you, as an individual, have the power to ensure that children are safe, well educated, and morally grounded, tell yourself:

- I can ask my social club, employer, sorority, fraternity, or choir to **adopt a school** or a class.
- I can **start a homework club**, chess club, Scrabble Club, or debating team on my block.
- I can **make sure my children know** about the dangers of handguns, refuse to allow a handgun in my home, and urge elected officials to keep handguns out of the hands of young people.
- I can **hold a yard sale** and donate the proceeds to an after-school program.
- I can **write a letter to the editor** about children's issues in my community or meet with my newspaper's editorial board to educate the members about the needs of children in my community.
- I can **find out about local immunization** projects and share the information with parents in my neighborhood or organize a project myself.
- I can **give one child a music lesson** once a week.
- I can **attend police and community meetings** and raise concerns about children's safety.
- I can **organize a winter coat and shoe drive** for children in need or go through my children's toy box with them and donate some toys to another child or shelter.
- I can **encourage my employer** to institute a flex-time policy that encourages employees to attend school-related activities or start one myself if I am an employer.
- I can make sure that there are **no toxic materials** like lead paint in my home.
- I can **raise or give money** to sponsor a child for a week at camp.
- I can **buy extra school supplies** when I shop with my children and donate them to a shelter or neighborhood school.
- I can **collect used children's books** from my neighbors and donate them to a children's program or a child health clinic.
- I can ask my church or mosque to **open the building** at night for children in the community who need tutoring.
- I can demand that store owners in my neighborhood **not sell alcohol** or cigarettes to minors.
- I can **start a bus token drive** for students who cannot afford transportation costs to school.
- I can **have a story hour** in my living room every Sunday for neighborhood children.
- I can **survey my community** for abandoned houses, vacant lots, and drug houses that are harmful to children and work to get rid of them.
- I can **form a library club** on my block and escort children to the library once a month.
- I can help children on my block **create a neighborhood garden** or a container garden.
- I can **call a radio talk show** to speak out on behalf of children and speak the truth to those who spread a message of hate, fear, and prejudice.
- I can learn about which elected officials **support children's issues** and vote for them.
- I can **organize a summer nutrition program** to provide needed meals for hungry children.
- I can **invite a teenager** to accompany me twice a week on my morning run or walk or invite a neighborhood child to accompany my family on a trip to a museum or playground.
- **Everybody can help produce extraordinary results** for children by doing some very ordinary things. Let's all of us begin thinking of ways that we can make a difference and never accept the notion that we have too little money, time, or education to do so.

Reprinted. Marian Wright Edelman is Executive Director of the Children's Defense Fund.

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America Reads: Wisconsin Reads!

State Superintendent John Benson wants every child in Wisconsin to read well by the end of third grade. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is rallying its resources to help families, schools, and communities realize this goal. DPI staff from Family-Community-School Partnerships, Title 1, Even Start, Early Childhood, Reading Education, Libraries, and Youth Service Learning are working together to help schools and communities coordinate *America Reads* initiatives which will be announced by the U.S. Department of Education in the next few months.

Following are some things everyone can do to ensure that *Wisconsin Reads!* You can become involved right now:

Instill a love of reading in your child. Learning begins at home—parents are their child's first teacher. By reading aloud to their children regularly and using TV wisely, parents can empower their children with the lifelong habit of reading.

Call a local school or literacy organization and volunteer! Many community and civic groups already sponsor tutoring programs can always use extra volunteers. A resource list of organizations providing reading partners is provided below.

Call 1-800-USA-LEARN (http:\\www.ed.gov) and ask to receive materials on starting an America Reads Challenge Project. Whether you are a parent, educator, or community volunteer, you can help ensure that America Reads by starting or becoming involved in a tutoring partnership in your local school or community. Many national organizations sponsor reading challenge projects in which reading partners pledge to read and write with a child for 30 to 60 minutes, at least once or twice a week during the school year and/or summer. The child pledges to read 30 minutes a day, five days a week, and learn a new vocabulary word a day.

Call the college or university nearest you, or your alma mater, to see if they have joined the America Reads Challenge. The best office to begin with may be the Financial Aid Offices.

Stay aware of what's going on by keeping in touch with Wisconsin DPI staff involved in this project. Call 1-800-441-4563 and ask for Monica Notaro or Myrna Toney, Title I; Darcy Wirebaugh, Even Start; Frances De Usabel or Jane Roeber, public libraries; Jacque Karbon, reading education; Ruth Anne Landsverk or Jane Grinde, Partnerships; Stan Potts, Youth Service Learning.

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Redefining "Family Involvement:" Challenges for Schools Today

How do we establish effective partnerships with families and the community except by knowing who they are, their strengths, their needs, and how they are able to and want to contribute to their children's learning?

Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, advocates that schools should meet the needs of families and community members in at least six ways—the six "types" of involvement. Within those six types, however, are deeper questions that must be addressed if partnerships are to mean something.

Whether your goals are to increase volunteerism, improve student reading, or make your school a safer place to be, partnership advocates can use the following challenges and redefinitions to examine their own efforts and make sure they truly make a difference.

Type 1: Parenting

Challenges:

- Provide information to *all* families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who attend workshops or meetings at the school building.
- Enable families to share information with schools about background, culture, children's talents, goals, and needs.
- Make all information for families clear, usable, age-appropriate, and linked to children's success.

Redefinitions:

- "Workshop" is not only a *meeting* on a topic held at the school building at a particular time but also the *content* of a topic to be viewed, heard, or read at convenient times and varied locations.

Type 2: Communicating

Challenges:

- Make all memos, notices, and other print and non-print communications clear and understandable for all families.
- Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.
- Obtain ideas from families to improve the design and content of major communications, such as newsletters, report cards, and conference schedules.
- Establish an easy-to-use, two-way channel for communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school.

Redefinitions:

- "Communications about school programs and student progress" are not only from school-to-home but also include two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.

Type 3: Volunteering

Challenges:

- Recruit widely for volunteers so that all families know that their time and talents are welcome.
- Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable working parents to participate.
- Provide training for volunteers, and match time and talent with school needs.

Redefinitions:

- "Volunteer" not only means those who come to school during the day, but also those who support school goals and children's learning in any way, at any place, and at any time.

Type 4: Learning at Home

Challenges:

- Design and implement a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bi-monthly) for which students take responsibility to discuss important things they are learning with their families.
- Coordinate family-linked interactive homework assignments if students have several teachers.
- Involve families and their children in all important curriculum-related decisions.

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Redefinitions:

- "Homework" not only means work that students do alone, but also interactive activities that students share with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.
- "Help" at home means how families encourage, listen, react, praise, guide, monitor, and discuss schoolwork with their children, not how they "teach" children school subjects.

Type 5: Decision Making

Challenges:

- Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.
- Offer training to enable parent leaders to develop skills to serve as representatives of other families.
- Include student representatives along with parents in decision-making groups.

Redefinitions:

- "Decision making" means a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.
- Parent "leader" means a representative who shares information with and obtains ideas from other families and community members, not just a parent who attends school meetings.

Type 6: Collaborating With Community

Challenges:

- Solve turf problems of roles, responsibilities, funds, and places for collaborative activities.
- Inform all families and students about community programs and services.
- Assure equal opportunities for students and families to obtain services or participate in community programs.
- Match business and community volunteers and resources with school boards.

Redefinitions:

- "Community" means not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located, but also any neighborhoods or locations that influence their learning and development.
- "Community" is rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but also by strengths and talents available to support students, families, and schools.
- "Community" includes not only families with children in the schools, but also all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education.
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Adapted from "School/Family/Community Partnerships," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1995, pp. 701-712.

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Improving School-Family-Community Partnerships in the Middle Grades

by Joyce L. Epstein

This We Believe, the position paper of the National Middle School Association, discusses 12 characteristics of responsive middle level schools. The beliefs set high expectations for good people, good places, and good programs in the middle grades. They are presented as important goals to improve the quality of life in schools and the quality of education for all young adolescents.

One characteristic of a responsive middle level school is "family and community partnerships." This goal is on every list for school improvement, but few schools have implemented comprehensive programs of partnership. This article addresses three questions to help middle level educators move from their beliefs to action: (a) What is a comprehensive program of school-family-community connections in the middle grades? (b) How do family and community partnerships link with the other elements of an effective middle level school? (c) How can schools answer the call to action to develop and maintain productive programs of partnerships?

A Framework for a Comprehensive Program of Partnerships: Six Types of Involvement

For decades studies have shown that *families are important* for children's learning, development, and school success across the grades. Research is accumulating that extends that social fact by showing that *school programs of partnership are important* for helping all families support their children's education from preschool through high school. Left on their own, few families continue as active partners in the middle grades. Currently, few families understand the ins and outs of early adolescence, middle level education, school and community programs and activities available to their children, the school system, and other issues and options that affect students in the middle grades. Studies show that *if* middle level schools implement comprehensive and inclusive programs of partnership then many more families respond, including those who would not become involved on their own.

What is a comprehensive program of partnerships? From many studies and activities with educators and families, I have developed a framework of six types of involvement that helps schools establish full and productive programs of school-family-community partnerships. This section summarizes the six major types of involvement with a few sample practices that may be important in the middle grades. Also noted are some of the challenges that must be met for good implementation of partnership practices and examples of the results that can be expected from each type of involvement in the middle grades.

Type 1—Parenting

Assist families with parenting skills, understanding young adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. Obtain information from families to help schools understand families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for their children.

Sample practices for middle level schools. Conduct workshops for parents; provide short, clear summaries of important information on parenting; and organize opportunities for parents to exchange ideas on topics of young adolescent development including health, nutrition, discipline, guidance, peer pressure, preventing drug abuse, and planning for the future. Provide information in useful forms on children's transitions to the middle grades and to high school, attendance policies, and other topics that are important for young adolescents' success in school. Offer parent education and family support programs. Design activities that teachers use at the start of each school year or periodically to ask parents to share insights about their children's strengths, talents, interests, needs, and goals.

Challenges. One challenge for successful Type 1 activities is *to get information to those who cannot come to meetings and workshops at the school building.* This may be done with videos, tape recordings, summaries, newsletters, cable broadcasts, phone calls, and other print and nonprint communications. Another Type 1 challenge is to *design procedures that enable all families to share information about their children with teachers, counselors, and others.*

Expected results. If information flows to and from families about young adolescent development, parents should increase their confidence

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about parenting, students should be more aware of parents' continuing guidance, and teachers should better understand their students' families. Specifically, if practices are targeted to help families send their children to school on time, then student attendance should improve.

Type 2—Communicating

Communicate with families about school programs and student progress with school-to-home and home-to-school contacts such as notices, memos, conferences, report cards, newsletters, phone and computerized messages, open houses, and other innovative communications.

Sample practices for middle level schools. Provide clear information on each teacher's criteria for report card grades, how to interpret interim reports, and, as necessary, how to work with students to improve grades. Conduct conferences for parents with teams of teachers, or conduct parent-student-teacher conferences to ensure that students take personal responsibility for learning. Organize class parents, block parents, or telephone trees for more effective communications. Set up the equivalent of a education welcome wagon for families who transfer to the school during the school year. Improve school newsletters to include student work and recognitions, parent columns, important calendars, and parent response forms.

Challenges. One challenge for successful Type 2 activities is *to make communications clear and understandable for all families*, including parents who have less formal education or who do not read English well, so that all families can process and respond to the information they receive. Other Type 2 challenges are to *know which families are and are not receiving the communications* in order to work to reach all families, *develop effective two-way channels of communication* so that families can easily contact and respond to educators, *and make sure that young adolescent students understand and participate* in all school-family-community partnerships.

Expected results. If communications are clear and useful and two-way channels are easily accessed, home-school interactions should increase; more families should understand the school's programs, follow their children's progress, and attend parent-teacher conferences. Specifically, if computerized phone lines are used to communicate information about homework, more families should know more about their children's daily assignments. If newsletters include respond-and-reply forms, more families will offer ideas, questions, and comments about school programs and activities.

Type 3—Volunteering

Improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve parents and others as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

Sample practices for middle level schools. Collect information on family members' talents, occupations, interests, and availability to serve as volunteers to enrich students' subject classes; improve career explorations; serve as language translators; conduct attendance monitoring and phone calls; work on "parent patrols" for safety; organize and improve activities such as clothing and uniform exchanges, school stores, fairs, and many other activities. Create opportunities for mentors, coaches, tutors and leaders of after-school programs to ensure that middle grades students have important and safe activities that expand their skills and talents. Establish a Family Center at the school where parents may obtain information, conduct volunteer work for the school, or meet with other parents (Johnson, 1996).

Challenges. Challenges for successful Type 3 activities are to *recruit volunteers widely so that all feel welcome, make hours flexible for parents and other volunteers who work during the school day, provide needed training; and enable volunteers to contribute productively* to the school, classroom curricula, and after-school programs at the school and in the community. Volunteers will be better integrated in a school program if there is a coordinator who matches volunteers' times and skills with the needs of teachers, administrators, and students. Another Type 3 *challenge is to change the definition of "volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals or students' learning at any time and in any place.* A related challenge is to *aid young adolescents in understanding how volunteers help their school, and to volunteer themselves to help their school, family, and community.*

Expected results. If schedules and locations are varied, more parents, family members, and others in the community should become volunteers that support the school and students as members of audiences. More families should feel comfortable and familiar with the school and staff, more students will talk and interact

with varied adults, and more teachers should be aware of and use parents' and other community members' talents and resources to improve school programs and activities. Specifically, if volunteers conduct a "hall patrol" or are active in other locations, student behavior problems should decrease due to a better student-adult ratio. If volunteers serve as tutors, students should improve their skills in that subject; if volunteers discuss careers, students should be more aware of their options for the future.

Type 4—Learning at home

Involve families with their children in academic learning activities at home that are coordinated with students' classwork and that contribute to success in school, including interactive homework, goal setting, and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions about courses and programs.

Sample practices for middle level schools. Provide information to students and to parents about the skills needed to pass each course and each teacher's homework policies. Implement activities that help families encourage, praise, guide, and monitor their children's work using interactive homework, student-teacher-family contracts, long-term projects, summer home-learning packets, student-led conferences with parents at home about their writing, goal setting activities, or other interactive strategies that keep students and families talking about schoolwork at home. (See for example *Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork* (TIPS) by Epstein, Salinas & Jackson, 1995.)

Challenges. One challenge for successful Type activities is to *implement a regular schedule of interactive work* that requires students to take responsibility for discussing important things they are learning, interviewing family members, recording reactions, and sharing their work and ideas. Another Type 4 challenge is to *create procedures and activities that involve families regularly and systematically with students on short-term and long-term goal setting* for attendance, achievement, behavior, talent development, and future plans.

Expected results. If Type 4 activities are well designed and implemented, student homework completion, report card grades, and test scores in specific subjects should improve; more families should know what their children are learning in class and how to monitor, support, and discuss their schoolwork. Students and teachers should be more aware of family interest in students' work.

Type 5—Decision making

Include families in developing school vision and mission statements and other policies and school decisions as participants on school improvement teams, committees, PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, Title I school and district councils, and advocacy groups.

Sample practices for middle level schools. Organize and maintain an active parent association; and include family representatives on all committees for school improvement such as curriculum, safety, supplies and equipment, partnerships, and career development. Train parents and teachers in leadership, decision-making, and collaboration. Identify and prepare information desired by families about school policies, course offerings, student placements and groups, special services, tests and assessments, and annual results for students of their experiences and evaluations. Include family representatives along with teachers, administrators, students, and community as members of the Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships.

Challenges. One challenge for successful Type 5 activities is *to include in leadership roles parent representatives from all of the race and ethnic groups, socioeconomic groups, and geographic communities* that are present in the middle level school. A related challenge is *to help parent leaders serve as true representatives* to obtain information from and provide information to all parents about decisions that are made. Another Type 5 challenge is to *include middle grades student representatives in decision-making groups* and leadership positions. An ongoing challenge is to *help parent and teacher members of committees to trust, respect, and listen to each other* as they work toward common goals for school improvement.

Expected results. If Type 5 activities are well implemented, more families should have input to decisions that affect the quality of their children's education, students should increase their awareness that families have a say in school policies; and teachers should increase their understanding of family perspectives on policies and programs for improving the school.

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Type 6—Collaborating with Community

Coordinate the work and resources of community businesses; agencies; cultural, civic, and religious organizations, colleges or universities; and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Enable students, staff, and families to contribute their services to the community.

Sample practices for middle level schools. Inform students and families about the existence of programs and resources in their community such as after-school recreation, tutorial programs, health services, cultural events, service opportunities, and summer programs. Design processes that increase equity of access for students and families to community resources and programs. Collaborate with community businesses, groups, and agencies in ways that strengthen the other types of involvement such as conducting parent education workshops for families at community or business locations (Type 1); communicating about school events via local radio, TV, churches, clinics, supermarkets, and laundromats (Type 2); soliciting volunteers from businesses and the community and organizing activities such as "gold card" discount programs with local merchants (Type 3); enriching student learning with artists, scientists, writers, mathematicians, and others whose careers link to the school curriculum (Type 4); and including community members on decision making councils and committees (Type 5).

Challenges. One challenge for successful Type 6 activities is to *solve the problems associated with community/school collaborations* such as "turf" problems of funding and leadership for cooperative activities. Another Type 6 challenge is to *recognize and link students' valuable learning experiences in the community to the school curricula* (such as lessons for nonschool skills and talents, club and volunteer work). A major challenge is to inform and involve the family in community related activities that affect their children.

Expected results. Well-implemented Type 6 activities should increase the knowledge that families, students, and schools have about resources and programs in their community that could help them reach important goals and increase the equity of access to those opportunities. Coordinated community services should help more students and their families solve problems that arise in early adolescence before they become too serious. Type 6 activities also should support and measurably enrich school curricula and extra curricula programs.

The six types of involvement create a comprehensive program of partnerships, but the implementation challenges for each type must be met in order for programs to be effective. The results expected are directly linked to the design and content of the activities. Not every practice to involve families will result in higher student test scores. Rather, practices for each type of involvement can be selected to help students, families, and teachers reach specific goals or results. The summary above offers a few of hundreds of suggestions that can help middle level schools build good partnerships.

Linking Partnerships to Other Recommended Middle Level Characteristics

The twelve characteristics of responsible middle level schools in *This We Believe* are interrelated. *Educators who want to work with young adolescents* contribute to a *shared vision* that stipulates *high expectations for all*. The school program ensures high support with an *adult advocate for every student* and *partnerships with all students' families and communities*. Academically, *the curriculum for each subject is challenging, integrative, and exploratory*. Teachers *use varied instructional approaches, assessments, and evaluations within a flexible instructional organization*. Students are offered *good guidance and programs that promote their health and safety*. These elements combine to promote all students' *learning* in a *climate* that is inviting, challenging, and joyful.

Each element also can be linked to all others. It is particularly important for middle level educators to understand how school-family-community partnerships are linked to the other recommended elements so that parent involvement is not something extra, separate, or different from the "real work" of a school. Consider the following family and community connections to other recommendations in *This We Believe*:

Educators committed to young adolescents.

To understand young adolescents, educators need to understand their students' families—their cultures, hopes, and dreams. In a good partnership program, families are helped to understand young adolescents, middle level schools, peer pressure, and other topics of impor-

tance; and educators are helped to understand students' families. Indeed, middle level educators serve as role models for students by the way they talk about, talk with, and work with students' families. Many young adolescents are trying to balance their love for their family, need for guidance, and need for greater independence. Middle level educators who understand students' families can help students see that these seemingly contradictory pressures can coexist.

A shared vision.

Along with educators and students, families and community members must contribute to the shared vision of a responsive middle level school. Structures, processes, and specific practices are needed that enable parents and community members to provide input to a new vision or mission statement and to periodic revisions of these documents. Vision and mission statements should be presented and discussed each year as new families and students enter or transfer to the middle level school.

High expectations for all.

National and local surveys of middle grades students and their families indicate that they have very high expectations for success in school and in life. Fully 98% of a national sample of eighth grade students plan to graduate from high school, and 82% plan at least some post secondary schooling, with 70% aiming to complete college (Epstein & Lee, 1995). Responsive middle level schools must incorporate students' and families' high aspirations into the school's high expectations for all. This means helping students take the courses they need to meet their goals, and assisting students when they need extra help by coaching classes, offering extra elective courses and summer classes, and using other responsive practices.

An adult advocate for every student

School-based advocates and teacher advisors need to know each student's family. In some schools, students have the same advisor/advocate every year. This makes it possible for the advisor and students' families to get to know each other well. The advocate can serve as a key contact for the family should questions or concerns arise, facilitating two-way channels of communication before problems become too serious to solve.

A positive school climate.

A safe, welcoming, stimulating, and caring environment describes a school for students, educators, families, and the community. In a school with good partnerships, family and community members are more likely to volunteer to help ensure the safety of the playground, hallways, and lunchroom; to share their talents in classroom discussions; and lead or coach programs after school to create a true school community.

Curriculum that is challenging, integrative, and exploratory.

Families and communities need to know about all of the courses, special programs, and services that are offered to increase student learning in the middle grades. Good information about the curriculum helps families know that their children's schools are hard at work and helps them discuss important academic topics with their young adolescents. Families also need good information about how their students are progressing in each subject, how to help students set and meet learning goals, and how to work with students to solve major problems that threaten course or grade level failure. Some middle level schools create student educational plans based on conferences with students and parents (Lloyd, 1996). If schools are serious about student learning, school-family-community partnerships must include information and involvement on the curriculum.

Varied teaching and learning approaches.

Families need to know more about the varied instructional approaches that middle grades teachers use in all subjects, including group activities, problem solving strategies, prewriting strategies, students as historians, and other challenging innovations to promote learning. Many new approaches are unfamiliar to families so they may not understand the varied ways that students learn different subjects. Some instructional approaches can be designed to involve parents as does the Teachers Involve Parents in School (TIPS) interactive homework process that asks students to share, show, and demonstrate not only what they are learning in class but how they are learning math, science, and language arts in the middle grades.

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Assessments and evaluations that promote learning.

Families and community members need to know about the major tests, new or traditional assessments, report card criteria, and other standards that school use to determine children's progress and paths. In Maryland, for example, many schools conduct evening meetings for parents to learn about and try items on new performance-based assessments. Students and families also can help set learning goals and strategies for reaching goals. They can rate progress in parent-teacher-student conferences, on student self-report cards and family-report cards. Project Write in Massachusetts asked students to share their writing portfolios with a parent and obtain reactions and suggestions. Middle grades educator Ross Burkhardt extended this family review by asking students to reflect on their families' reactions and write about their next steps for improving their writing. Students and families also should have opportunities to rate the quality of school programs each year. There are many ways to include students and families in important assessments and evaluations that make those measures more meaningful.

Flexible organizational structures.

Families need to understand "interdisciplinary teams" and "houses," schedules, electives or exploratories, and other arrangements that define middle level school organizations (Mac Iver & Epstein, 1991). Every middle level school should have annual group meetings and individual meetings of parents, teachers, and advisors to ensure that families understand how classes are organized and have input to the decisions that affect their children's experiences and education.

Programs and policies that foster health and safety.

Family responsibilities for their children's health and safety out of school link directly to what happens in school. Students, families, and community members must help develop and review safety policies, health policies, dress codes, lunch menus, facilities and equipment, and other policies and conditions that concern children's health and safety. If schools refer students for special services, families must be part of those decisions.

Comprehensive guidance and support services.

Families need to know about formal and informal guidance programs at the school. This includes knowing the names, phone numbers, e-mail or voice-mail of their children's teachers, counselors, advocates, or administrators in order to reach them with questions about their children's life or work at school. In some middle level schools, guidance counselors are members of interdisciplinary teams and meet with teachers, parents, and students on a regular schedule and in other meetings as needed.

School-family-community partnerships must link with all of the elements of effective middle level schools to ensure that families will remain important, positive influences in their young adolescents' education as well as in their daily lives.

Call to Action: The National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools

Most middle level educators want to build strong school-family-community partnerships, but most have not reached this goal. Indeed, developing good connections among homes, schools, and communities is an ongoing process that takes time, organization, and effort. Based on research and the work of many educators, parents and students, I have initiated a program to help all elementary, middle, and high schools build positive, permanent programs of partnerships with families and communities.

Schools, districts, and state departments of education are invited to join the National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools at Johns Hopkins University to obtain assistance in improving school-family-community connections by the year 2000. There are no membership fees to join the National Network, but states, districts, and schools must meet a few requirements.

Each Partnership-2000 School agrees to strengthen its program by using an action team approach and by addressing the six major types of involvement. Each school tailors its plans and practices for the six types of involvement to the needs and interests of its students, parents, and teachers. Each school starts with an inventory of present practices, develops a three-year outline, and annual action plans. District and state leaders are helped to organize their leadership activities to assist increasing numbers of schools to conduct these activities.

The National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools is not an "extra" program but is part of every school improvement plan. To obtain an invitation and membership forms for schools, districts, or states, write to: Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, Director, National Network of Partnership-2000 Schools, Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships & CRESPAR, 3505 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218.

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Quotable Quotes

We must continue to make efforts to erase the differences in achievement between boys and girls and between white students and other ethnic groups. All students can achieve high academic standards if parents, teachers, schools, and communities have the will and the resources to dedicate to children's education.

—John T. Benson

Parents should be thought of as scholars of experience. They are in for the continuum. They have their doctorate in perseverance. They and the system must be in concert or the vision shrinks.

—D. Sylvester

All employees need new kinds of skills: learning how to learn; problem solving; and team work, which includes respect for differences and ability to communicate and listen.

—Tony Wagner
Institute for Responsive Education

An optimist is a person who sees a green light everywhere, while the pessimist sees only the red stoplight. The truly wise person is color blind.

—Albert Schweitzer

Too often we give children answers to remember rather than problems to solve.

—Roger Levin

The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism.

—Dr. Norman Vincent Peale

True creativeness is finding new possibilities in old situations.

—Wilfred Peterson

Each of us must come to care about everyone else's children. We must recognize that the welfare of our children and grandchildren is intimately linked to the welfare of all other people's children. After all, when one of our children needs lifesaving surgery, someone else's child will perform it. If one of our children is threatened or harmed by violence, someone else's child will be responsible for the violent act. The good life for your own children can be secured only if a good life is also secured for all other people's children.

—Lillian Katz

Schools are very powerful places. What goes on or fails to go on in them greatly influences all children's futures. However, parents and teachers are often uncertain in their relationships with each other. Each is concerned about the judgment of the other. Each feels vulnerable, exposed, unsafe, and insecure. Even other teachers feel this way when interacting with their children's teachers.

—Vivian R. Johnson

Loyalty to petrified opinions never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul in this world—and never will.

—Mark Twain

It's easy to identify people who can't count to ten. They're in front of you in the supermarket express lane.

—June Henderson

Logic tells us that children who receive more attention as they strive to learn to read, to write, and to count; as they learn how to get along with their peers; and as they learn about other adults' expectations of them are more likely to succeed in school and ultimately in life.

—John T. Benson